

## CEWC Cymru

### Skills for Democracy project

The Electoral Commission established the New Initiatives Fund to support and promote new ways of raising awareness about voting and democracy. We have awarded grants to local, community and national organisations working with different target audiences across the whole of the UK.

This evaluation report provides information about CEWC Cymru's Skills for Democracy project funded by the New Initiatives Fund. In the report we highlight the aims, objectives and achievements of the project, and lessons learnt by CEWC Cymru.

CEWC Cymru is an educational charity working with young people to promote active global citizenship in Wales. It also provides resources for citizenship and personal and social education. Prior to Skills for Democracy they ran two NIF-funded projects: Your Say and Training for Democracy.

### Aims and objectives

The aim of the project was to increase young people's interest in and capacity for participation in democracy, and to help teachers support this goal.

The project's objectives were to:

- confirm which factors most limit the democratic participation of 13–18-year-olds, particularly in disadvantaged areas of Wales
- devise classroom resources for this age group
- assist in the delivery of sessions in schools across Wales
- enable schools in Wales to engage young people in the work of the National Assembly
- develop the CEWC website to include bilingual guidance and interactive activities for

young people aimed at reinforcing the knowledge and skills required for participation

### Funding

The project received a grant of £28,287 from September 2005 to March 2007.

### How successful was the project?

The project consisted of two phases: one (September 2005 – July 2006) focused on developing materials and working in partnership with selected schools; the second (September 2006 – March 2007) focused primarily on networking and developing sustainable partnerships where the materials produced in phase one could be accessed.

The impact of the project was evaluated in three of the 25 participating schools, which were diverse in terms of commitment to the project, experience and roles of teachers and the background from which the pupils came. Pupils were polled via a questionnaire and individual interviews were carried out with staff. It was clear that different schools engaged with the

project in very different ways, and the resulting impact on the school also varied as a result. Where there was strong institutional commitment, Skills for Democracy has influenced curriculum development and approaches to teaching. In schools where there was limited support for the project and democracy was an underdeveloped aspect of school life, the impact at the level of the teaching staff was limited and it was difficult to see any longer-term benefit to the school.

As a result of the project, 50 practising teachers and approximately 100 trainee teachers were better equipped to develop young people's skills and understanding of democracy. They also informed over 250 schools on how to participate in a mock National Assembly campaign. The process of developing the project website took longer than envisaged; this is because additional funding became available enabling them to raise the specification and develop the technical sophistication of the site, and they plan to undertake a publicity drive for the site, targeting schools and young people accessing their events. They are confident that they will exceed the target figure of 200 young people visiting the site for the first time.

Teachers valued the opportunity to discuss the materials and approach to teaching with the CEWC Cymru project leader, which often led to adaptation of the materials and activities to suit the context. Many said they would continue to use the materials after the end of the

project. Pupils have benefited in developing self-awareness, skills in presenting their own views, and the ability to think through issues and consider different perspectives. In schools where democracy was viewed as a topic to be taught rather than a way of working with pupils and exploring issues, pupils still benefited at an individual level, but the long-term impact on the schools appears to be limited.

A statutory requirement was introduced for all primary, secondary and special schools in Wales to have held their first School Council meeting by 1 October 2006, which led to increased interest in the project. During the second phase of Skills for Democracy, the focus shifted to dissemination and networking. Work was done with the Schools Council for the Welsh Assembly, with the Hansard Society, on developing the CEWC Cymru's Young People and Encouraging Participation websites. They also developed materials with the University of Wales Institute in Cardiff for use in teacher training courses. Work was also done on preparatory materials for the National Assembly for Wales elections in May 2007. The project continued to work with schools but in a staff development role rather than working directly with pupils. The Skills for Democracy pack was translated into Welsh and made available in hard copy and through the project's website.

Schools in this pilot project have gained a great deal of experience and most have plans to develop and use the Skills for Democracy materials. In addition, CEWC

Cymru has worked effectively with key stakeholders in the sector, disseminating learning and resources to a wide audience and demonstrating the ability to transfer their approach to the project to other contexts, contributing to the capacity-building of other organisations.

## Good practice

- Materials developed are relevant, engaging, pitched at appropriate levels and easily adaptable to different contexts.
- The project leader's approach in working alongside teaching staff has resulted in a significant impact on the attitude of teaching staff as well as providing positive learning experiences for pupils.
- Teachers felt that the support provided to them in implementing the use of the resources in the classroom was crucial in contributing to the success of the project.
- The materials were not produced in isolation, but the approach to learning required for the project also reflects democratic principles.

## Lessons learnt

Projects of a similar nature can learn from the following lessons:

- It is clear that schools which have limited democratic practices are less likely to engage with a project like this. Further work is needed to explore the barriers to developing democratic practices in such schools.
- Some schools perceive citizenship and democracy as separate and discrete topics. Efforts need to be made to break down these perceptions

and explore the links between these topics and other elements of the PSE curriculum.

- The project activities required sessions to be approximately an hour long, which provided logistical problems for some schools. Schools were creative in working around this, but it required considerable commitment on their part and was not ideal.

### Further information

For further information about this project please contact:

Martin Pollard  
Education Officer  
CEWC Cymru  
Temple of Peace  
Cathays Park  
Cardiff CF10 3AP

Tel: 029 2022 8549  
martinpollard@wcia.org.uk  
www.cewc-cymru.org.uk

Further information about the New Initiatives Fund and the wider work of the Electoral Commission can be found at: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

We are an independent body set up by the UK Parliament. Our aim is integrity and public confidence in the democratic process. We regulate party and election finance and set standards for well-run elections. For more information see: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

**The  
Electoral  
Commission**